Online Grapevine

Find summer fun online as commercial services' battle for family subscriptions heats up.

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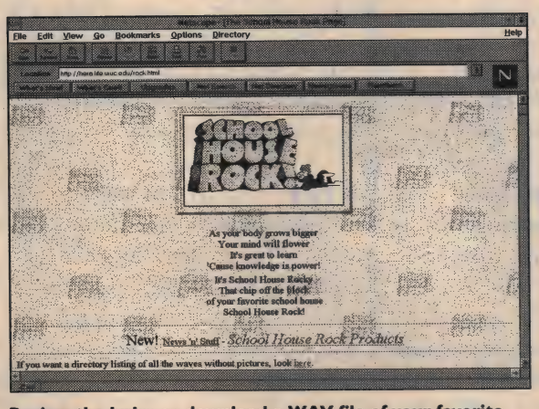
School's out, and in households across America, cries of boredom and complaints that there's nothing to do mark the beginning of summer. Not to fear. This month's "Online Grapevine" is packed with places and pastimes that will keep all audiences entertained.

ON THE NET

Netizens of all ages should get a kick out of the Schoolhouse Rock site (*http://hera.life.uiuc. edu/rock.html*), where the words to all of your favorite Saturday-morning ditties about math, science, history, grammar, and government are posted. Many of the lyrical lessons are also available as sound clips.

Once you've reviewed "I'm Just a Bill" and are in a legislatively educational state of mind, you may want to take the kids to see the latest addition to the White House's Web page—the White House for Kids (*http://www.whitehouse.gov/WH/kids/html/home.html*). This is an engaging cat's-eye view of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, led by Socks, the First Feline and the first cat to live in the White House since Amy Carter's Misty Malarkey Ying Yang.


File Edit View Go Bookmarks Options Directory Help
SCHOOL HOUSE ROCK
As your body grows bigger
Your mind will flower
It's great to learn
'Cause knowledge is power!
It's School House Rocky
That chip off the block
of your favorite school house
School House Rock!
New! News 'n' Stuff - School House Rock Products
If you want a directory listing of all the waves without pictures, look here.

Review the lyrics or download a WAV file of your favorite Saturday-morning lesson from this Web-based compendium of "SchoolHouse Rock."

If they're ready to rub elbows with their peers on the Web, younger kids will find lots to keep them busy at Maddy Mayhem's Kid's Stuff (*http://wchat.on.ca/merlene/kid.htm*), home to many interesting and "safe" links for little ones. Parents and chaperones must try not to be intimidated when they see that this site's six-year-old author can script HTML as well as any adult. (Truth be told, Mom's been helping.)

No online citizen should miss the permanent display of 24 Hours in Cyberspace (*http://www.cyber24.com*), the innovative photo-documentary project that drew participation from thousands of photographers and surfers last February 8. Brought to life by the same folks who did the "Day in the Life" books, this exhibit contains an amazing collection of pictures and stories about how online technology is changing the world.

Online technology has already changed the marketing world—witness extensions for wildly popular commercial products such as the Toy Story Web site (*http://www.toystory.com*). Last fall's Disney box-office favorite is one of this summer's juvenile hot spots, featuring a downloadable coloring book as well as pictures and sound clips. More-mature movie buffs can spend some serious hours getting lost in the Internet Movie Database (*http://www.ms.state. edu/Movies/*), renowned for its 62,000 movie reviews and 900,000 filmography entries.

Once you've seen enough on the silver screen and are ready for a change of pace, try out one of the Web's alternatives to Internet Relay Chat (IRC), such as the Webchat Broadcasting System (*http://www.irsociety.com*) or Columbus WWW Chat Forums (*http://www.ohiocap.com/Chat*). These sites are easier to navigate than IRC servers and don't require special software, so you can chat with Internet colleagues even if you're using an online service that doesn't provide IRC access.

And for those Sunday mornings when the house is quiet and there's time to sip a cup of coffee, treat yourself to This is True, a weekly compilation of strange-but-true news stories. To receive a copy of This is True in your e-mail inbox each week, write to *listserv@netcom.com* with the message "subscribe this-is-true." You can also visit the Web site at *http://www.freecom.com/TrueHome.*

If by some twist of fate, you've still got free time on your hands, you could spend a lazy summer afternoon looking for lost loves or old acquaintances. Just point your Web browser to Switchboard (*http://www.switchboard.com*), a free Web white- and yellow-pages directory that offers some 90 million residential and 10 million business listings. Unlike most other Net-based name-lookup tools, Switchboard isn't limited to finding people on the Internet; it's limited to people in the phone book. As useful as this service is, I find its power and the fact that it's available to anyone and everyone for free somewhat disturbing.

Want to put another Web-based yellow pages on the shelf next to Switchboard? Try BigBook (*http:// www.bigbook.com*), a roster of 11 million U.S. businesses including addresses, phone numbers, and customer ratings. One of BigBook's claims to fame is that it can show you a map of the physical location of each business. Unfortunately, I found its surveying capabilities to be wrong for several places I looked up: Apparently there are no roads within miles of my favorite deli.

Finally, before we turn to the commercial services, those of you who've left your vacation planning until the last minute may still be able to take in some of the Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta. To see which—if any—events still have tickets for sale, and to make your purchases, head to *http://www.atlanta.olympic.org.*

AMERICA ONLINE

Like CompuServe, AOL has decided to have its cake and eat it, too, when it comes to Web browsers: The service's new built-in browser is Microsoft's Internet Explorer. But you can use any browser of your choice, including Netscape Navigator, which is the default choice for AOL's GNN Internet-access service. As for sites on AOL itself, send your bored child to the service's ABC Kidzine (keyword: *kidzine*), which offers activities, a bulletin board, and chat rooms for young 'uns. Bored or nostalgic Gen-Xers may even enjoy a trip to the Inspector Gadget and Madeline areas therein.

If you're looking for more fun and games, brush up on your Web-searching skills by participating in the Seven Wonders of the Web challenge, a weekly Internet scavenger hunt (keyword: *7 Wonders*). If you successfully use the Web to answer the seven questions, you may win a prize. Big kids who like puzzles will also appreciate Crosswords America (keyword: *xwords*), where you can download a free daily puzzle and software for viewing it. There are also an online crossword magazine and a message board for word-wise fans.

COMPUSERVE

As spring was arriving, CompuServe announced a new software distribution, networking services, and a mar-

Shopper Online

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Starting this month, PC guru Alfred Poor, whose "Alfred Poor's Computer Cures" column appears in the Tech Section, will be dispensing troubleshooting tips from his own message section in the Shop Talk area of our Web site at *http://www.cshopper.com.*

While this is a new venue, Poor's been fielding questions on our forum on ZD Net/CompuServe (*GO ZNT: CSHOPPER*) for years and will continue to do so. Check in either place to get help for your computing ailments and advice on upgrading your hardware. As always, you can leave questions for other *Shopper* editors or our customer service representative, Monica Dixon, in the Feedback Forum at both spots as well.

Elsewhere on *Shopper's* Web base, ZD Net, you'll find two new tools available: a searchable online software library and a Ziff-Davis Publishing Editorial database. Visitors to ZD Net on the Web now have access to an extensive software library (*http://www.zdnet.com/zdi/software/*) from which to download freeware, shareware, and demo versions of applications.

The offerings are divided into categories—Games, Internet, Education, Home & Hobby, Programs & Utilities, and Editors' Picks. You'll also find featured files including newly released versions of sound editors, games, and scripting tools. If you don't know the name of the file you are looking for, or are just looking for an intriguing game or utility, you can perform a keyword search. The library contains more than 10,000 PC and Mac files.

ZD Net's second new searchable tool will come in handy when researching a computer project or purchase: You can now access the contents of all Ziff-Davis publications, including *Computer Shopper,* from January 1995 to the present. Searchable fields include publication, issue date, magazine section, author, and product or company name. You can search on keywords, too.

Finally, this month's Shopper Online event on CompuServe focuses on Hyper G, the new networking hypermedia system designed to give Web users greater linking ability between applications and data. Read David Aubrey's "Cool Links" story in this month's Tech Section, then join us in the Executives Online Forum (*GO ZNT:EXEC*) to learn if Hyper G is just hype or a unifying technology that could harness the power of the Internet as an information resource. ▼

Finding Us Online

Computer Shopper Online has sites on the World Wide Web, ZD Net/CompuServe Edition, and Microsoft Network. On each of these platforms, you can learn about the latest products and technologies, download *Computer Shopper* utilities, or discuss computers with fellow consumers. In addition, you can read hypertext versions of your favorite *Computer Shopper* articles and access biweekly columns not found in the magazine. BBS and User Group listings are available only from our online forums. Once you log on, it's easy to find us. Just follow these directions:

World Wide Web: To experience the Web Edition live, you need an Internet connection plus a World Wide Web browser such as Netscape Navigator. Once connected, just go to *http://www.cshopper.com.*

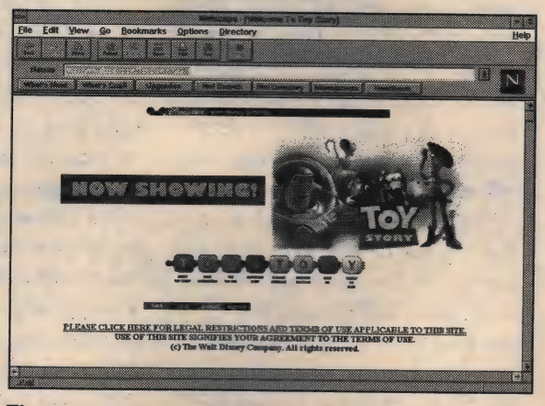
ZD Net/CompuServe Edition: If you already are a ZD Net/CompuServe member or are a CompuServe member and want to join, type *GO CSHOPPER.* Otherwise, call 800-895-4596 to sign up and receive *Computer Shopper*'s online introductory offer. Ask for the CSZ promotion, and you will get the ZD Net version of WinCim or MacCim, one free month of both CompuServe and ZD Net, a $15 usage credit, and three hours of Internet access.

Microsoft Network: If you are a member of MSN, access *ComputerShopper* from the main screen. (Choose Go To from the Edit pull-down menu.) You can also get to us by clicking on Categories/Computers, Software/Computer News, and Publications/Computer Shopper. To join MSN, you must have Windows 95.

COMPUTER SHOPPER ONLINE

keting relationship with Netscape Communications Corp. Under the agreement, the company now distributes Netscape Navigator to CIS subscribers and SpryNet Internet-access customers free of charge, while Netscape is adding CompuServe and SpryNet to the menu of ISPs found in the commercial version of Navigator.

Extending its communication services, CIS has added a page server so that pager-carrying subscribers can now receive e-mail in their pockets (*GO CIS:PAGER*). You can register any numeric or alphanumeric pager from any paging company in the U.S., but if you're using a device from one of CompuServe's "page partners"—including MobileComm, PageMart, and PageNet—you're billed only for a one-time registration fee of $5. Everyone else must pay an additional $4.95 per month plus 25 cents per message. Senders using CompuServe Mail simply prefix addressee names with "Mobile" (Mobile:username), while senders on the Internet can reach registered pagers with the syntax *username@@mobile.compuserve.com.*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The story continues: Visit Woody, Buzz Lightyear, and the rest of the cast and crew of Disney's animated *Toy Story* on the Web.

Elsewhere on the service, Jack Hanna, the zookeeper who occasionally torments David Letterman with animals both rare and cute, has put together a virtual safari: During an 18-day trek through South Africa, Hanna sent back electronic postcards with commentary, pictures, and maps of his adventures (*GO CIS:JUNGLEJACK*). While kids might not like this as much as staying up late to watch Letterman, it makes for good fun before bedtime.

CIS also recently rescinded its ban on nearly 200 naughty (or potentially so) newsgroups, to the collective cheers of free-speech advocates everywhere. Soon afterward, the service welcomed Playboy Multimedia into its fold, offering photos, QuickTime movies, and programming notes from Playboy Television (*GO CIS:PLAYTV*). Let me get this straight: First CompuServe bans online indecency, and now it's hosting some of its own. Putting the power to censor such content into subscribers' hands, CompuServe now provides a Parental Controls Center (*GO CIS:CONTROLS*), which lets parents bar access to certain Internet newsgroups, Internet Relay Chat, FTP, and Telnet as well as to adult-oriented areas on CompuServe itself.

If you're looking for something really family-friendly, you might prefer that the kids subscribe to CompuServe's new Wow service, which targets newbies with custom views for users of all ages. (See last month's "Hot Off the Wire" column, p. 609.) Wow is continually fleshing out its offerings with additions such as a Sports Illustrated for Kids area (also available on CIS and Time Warner's Pathfinder Web site, but no longer on Prodigy).

PRODIGY

Furthering its own family values, Prodigy has expanded its parental-controls software, giving parents the power to keep kids away from certain Internet sites. In fact, it's using the same software as CIS, CyberPatrol, to help parents keep smut away from children's' screens. Other good news for Prodigy subscribers is the service's addition of an offline reader, giving you the ability to browse and post to Prodigy BBSs, read news and financial information, and read and compose e-mail while offline. The NavStar software can save you big bucks by cutting online time, but first it will cost you $40 (Jumpword: *Navstar*). ▼